

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05

H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02

SS-15 USIA-06 TRSE-00 OMB-01 AID-05 EB-08 COME-00

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-----115609 041015Z /11

R 031752Z MAR 78

FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6902

INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

AMEMBASSY N

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

AMEMBASSY LOME

AMEMBASSY COTONOU

AMEMBASSY YOAUNDE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LAGOS 2745

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, NI, FR, XJ

SUBJECT: FRENCH FOREIGN MINISTER'S VISIT TO NIGERIA

SUMMARY: FRENCH FOREIGN MINISTER DE GUIRINGAUD'S VISIT TO LAGOS HAS BEEN MARKED BY PRESS CRITICISM OF FRENCH POLICY IN AFRICA. IN THE BILATERAL TALKS, THE FRENCH HAVE CONCENTRATED ON COMMERCIAL MATTERS, THE NIGERIANS ON AFRICAN POLITICAL PROBLEMS. WE EXPECT LITTLE SUBSTANTIAL RESULT. END SUMMARY.

1. FRENCH FOREIGN MINISTER DE GUIRINGAUD'S FOUR-DAY OFFICIAL VISIT TO LAGOS HAS BEEN MARKED BY SHARP CONFIDENTIAL

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LOCAL PRESS CRITICISM OF FRANCE'S ROLE IN AFRICA. DE GUIRINGAUD FACED UNFRIENDLY INTERROGATORS AT HIS AIRPORT ARRIVAL PRESS CONFERENCE. IN ADDITION DAILY TIMES (D.T.) A NATIONAL DAILY WITH CLOSE GOVERNMENT CONNECTIONS, HAS CARRIED EXTENSIVE EDITORIAL CRITICISM OF FRENCH POLICY.

2. AT MURTALA MUHAMMED AIRPORT ON MARCH 1, DE GUIRINGAUD SAID 'IT IS NECESSARY FOR FRANCE TO HAVE DIALOGUE WITH THE WHOLE OF AFRICA AND NOT ONLY THOSE WITH WHOM WE HAVE TRADITIONAL RELATIONS.' DE GUIRINGAUD ADDED THAT FRANCE WANTED 'TO LISTEN TO NIGERIA'S VOICE' AND HAD ALWAYS 'SUPPORTED THE NIGERIAN CAUSE.' HOWEVER, PRESS REPORTS INDICATE THAT DE GUIRINGAUD FACED AGGRESSIVE QUESTIONING ON FRENCH HOSTILITY TO ECOWAS, FRENCH SUPPORT FOR AUTHORIZATION REGIME IN FRANCOPHONE AFRICA, AND FRENCH BUSINESS RELATIONS WITH SOUTH AFRICA. D.T. REPORTER SAID DE GUIRINGAUD 'EITHER DENIED OUTRIGHT, CONTROVERTED OR EVEN EVADED SUCH ENQUIRIES.'

3 SIMILARLY, THE MARCH 2 D.T. COMMENTED EDITORIALY 'THERE IS NO PARTICULAR REASON WHY WE SHOULD FEEL EXCITED BY (DE GUIRINGAUD'S VISIT TO NIGERIA. RATHER, NIGERIA SHOULD TAKE THIS CHANCE TO LET HIM KNOW THAT SHE IS NOT PLEASED WITH THE ROLE FRANCE HAS BEEN PLAYING IN AFRICA EITHER NORTH OR SOUTH OF THE ZAMBEZI RIVER. THE EDITORIAL CONCLUDED, 'WE BELIEVE THAT NO COUNTRY, NO MATTER HOW POWERFUL, NO MATTER HOW ECONOMICALLY AND TECHNOLOGICALLY DEVELOPED SHOULD TAKE US FOR A RIDE. WE ALSO STRONGLY FEEL THAT THE TIME HAS COME WHEN WE SHOULD START ASKING FRANCE TO EITHER BE FOR US OR AGAINST US. WE HAVE HAD ENOUGH OF HER COSTLY AMBIGUITIES.' A SIMILAR ARTICLE IN THE D.T. SUGGESTED THAT 'NIGERIANS
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ARE NOT OBLIGED TO WELCOME MR. GUIRINGAUD MORE THAN IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY TO SATISFY DIPLOMATIC ETIQUETTE.'

4. MEA OFFICIALS HAVE INFORMED EMBASSY THAT DE GUIRINGAUD'S VISIT IS PRIMARILY AIMED AT PROMOTING INCREASED BILATERAL TRADE. HIS HOSTS IN TURN INSIST THAT HE ADEQUATELY FOCUS ON INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL 'REALITIES.' ACCORDING TO REPORT GIVEN TO ECON COUNSELOR, MEA HAD CAREFULLY DONE ITS HOMEWORK IN PREPARATION FOR FRENCH VISIT. AT MAIN MEA SESSION ON MARCH 2, COMMISSIONER GARBA WAS DESCRIBED AS BEING HIS MOST BLUNT SELF. GARBA CHECKED OFF A LIST OF POINTS OF CONTENTION RANGING FROM MILITARY ACTION AGAINST POLISARIO TO EXCESSIVE FRENCH ECONOMIC SUPPORT OF SOUTH AFRICA. DE GUIRINGAUD REPORTEDLY PARRIED EACH ISSUE WITH SMILES AND STATISTICS. IN REGARD TO SOUTH AFRICA, WHICH WAS THE MAIN TOPIC OF THE DAY, FOREIGN MINISTER POINTED OUT THAT ONLY 5 PERCENT OF FRANCE'S TOTAL TRADE WITH THE AFRICAN CONTINENT WAS WITH SOUTH AFRICA. MOREOVER, THE FRENCH WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR JUST A FRACTION OF SOUTH AFRICA'S TOTAL FOREIGN TRADE. IF CRITICISM WAS TO BE LEVIED ON FRANCE FOR DEALING WITH SOUTH AFRICA, IT SHOULD BE PROPORTIONAL TO THAT FRACTION OF SOUTH AFRICA'S

TRADE WHICH FRANCE CARRIED OUT. IF NIGERIA WAS CONCERNED

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OVER FRENCH PARTICIPATION, IT SHOULD BE EVEN MORE CONCERNED
WITH SUCH OTHER TRADING PARTNERS AS THE BRITISH, AMERICANS
AND GERMANS.

5. THE NIGERIANS ATTENDING THE MEA MEETING REPORTEDLY
FOUND THE FRENCH MINISTER URBANE AND WITTY BUT CONVOLATED
IN HIS VERBAL PRESENTATION. IN RELATED MEETINGS WITH HIS
STAFF, MEA OFFICIALS WERE IMPRESSED WITH THE CALIBER OF
SUPPORTING FRENCH PERSONNEL.

6. COMMENT: FRENCH-NIGERIAN RELATIONS HAVE NOT BEEN
GOOD SINCE THE SUBSTANTIAL FRENCH SUPPORT FOR BIAFRA
DURING THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR. AS A RESULT, THERE HAS
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ALWAYS BEEN A PARTICULARLY SHARP EDGE OF HOSTILITY TOWARDS FRANCE BEYOND THAT DIRECTED AT WESTERN COUNTRIES IN GENERAL BY NIGERIAN ACADEMICS AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ON QUESTIONS INVOLVING THE WESTERN ROLE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA.

7. SOURCE AT THE FRENCH EMBASSY TOLD THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR THAT THE VISIT WAS LARGELY CEREMONIAL (ASIDE FROM ECONOMIC TALKS), AND INTENDED TO BALANCE PREVIOUS VISITS TO FRANCOPHONE COUNTRIES. IN ANY CASE, DE GUIRINGAUD WOULD NOT BE IN OFFICE FOLLOWING THE FRENCH ELECTIONS. WITH ALL OF THIS IN MIND, IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE MUCH OF A SIGNIFICANCE COMING OUT OF THE VISIT. END COMMENT.
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